

## Summary of Witness Testimony **Alta Baker**

Ms. Baker is the owner and CEO of Safe Haven Enterprises, a woman-owned, HUBZone company located in Jennings, Louisiana, which is about two and half hours from New Orleans.. Safe Haven manufactures modular steel building for physical protection, is a fabricator of Department of State-certified windows and doors. They are general contractors capable of project management and debris clean up in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

According to the Center for Women's Business Research, over 47,000 women-owned businesses were operating in New Orleans prior to Katrina. They provided 100,000 jobs and generated \$11 billion in sales. Hurricane Katrina devastated many of these businesses, leaving hundreds without jobs or income. Ms. Baker took it upon herself to help out and hire additional welders and carpenters who need work. To date, they have hired seven and hope that work orders will come to provide for these new employees.

Safe Have Enterprises is a small business located in a small town, but their largest federal customer is the Department of State. They also have the United States army Corps of Engineers on their client roster. In fact, one of their units is a command center located on a levee in New Orleans.

Key to the recovery of this devastated region is the provision that establishes a 30% prime contracting goal and a 40% subcontracting goal for small businesses in the Katrina-related reconstruction contracts.

Ms. Baker, who is a member of Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP), raises one major concern. The "Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act to Meet Immediate Needs Arising from the Consequences of Hurricane Katrina, 2005" contained a provision that raised the limit of micropurchase threshold from \$2,500 to \$250,000. WIPP is concerned that this provision invites waste, fraud and abuse in

federal contracts, but also undermines the ability of small businesses to help in the recovery effort. The small business reserve sets aside federal contracts that are less than \$100,000. Since the threshold has been raised to \$250,000, which can be bought with a credit card, WIPP believes that the small business reserve will be useless.